Title: Murder of Native American Artifact Collector Still Unsolved

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The 1940s were the heyday for Fairbury area Native American artifact collectors. They even formed the Fairbury Archeology Club in 1941. Ben Nussbaum was a nationally recognized collector of one type of artifact known as bannerstones. He was commonly called "Bannerstone Ben". Edgar Zook was another of the prominent members of that group. Marion Knott was also an avid collector of artifacts.

The story of Marion Knott begins with his sixth great grandfather emigrating from England to Maryland prior to 1705. Francis Knott (1649-1705) married Eleanor White (1652-1705) and they lived in Maryland. The Knott family remained in the Maryland area for several generations before moving to Kentucky and eventually Peoria.

The parents of Marion Knott were Loren Albert Knott (1872-1949) and Mary E. Hillard (1880-1961). Marion Russel Knott was born in Peoria in 1904. Loren Knott was 28 years of age when he married 21 year old Mary Hillard. Loren and Mary Knott had nine children.

In the 1910 Census, Loren and Mary Knott were living in Forrest with their four children. These children included Marion, Alma, Raymond, and Earl Knott. Loren Knott's occupation was to repair railroad cars. By the 1920 Census, the Loren Knott family had moved to a farm in Pleasant Ridge Township. Loren switched occupations from a railroad car repairman to a farmer. The family had increased to six children and son Marion was 15 years of age.

In 1929, Marion Knott married Miss Ethel Hill of Weston, Illinois. Marion was 25 years of age and Ethel was thirteen years old when they married. Dr. Charles S. Davies officiated the wedding in the Fairbury Presbyterian Church. She was the daughter of George B. Hill, a Weston blacksmith. The bride was attended by Miss Juanita Hornsby and Burbon Downing of Fairbury. The newlyweds initially made their home in Fairbury.

In the 1930 Census, Marion Knott reported that he and his 16 year old wife Ethel were living with his parents at 405 West Cherry Street in Fairbury. Thirteen year old Marjorie Knott, Marion's sister, and eleven year old Lloyd Knott, Marion's brother, were also living in the same home.

After seven years of a marriage, Marion and Ethel Knott divorced in 1936. They had no children. On December 7, 1941, the Japanese Navy Air Service attacked Pearl Harbor in Hawaii. This was the start of World War II for America.

Shortly before the Pearl Harbor attack, the Fairbury Archaeological Society was formed. This group of Fairbury men held a meeting every two weeks. They studied Indian lore in

the cold winter months and took field trips in the warmer months. This group sponsored and conducted seven special meetings which were attended by artifact collectors from all over Central Illinois. Benjamin Nussbaum was President of the Fairbury Archaeological Society. Vice-President was Burbon Downing. Edgar Zook was Secretary, and Wade Simmons was Treasurer. The group had a total of ten members. Marion Knott was one of the charter club members.

In late 1942, both Marion Knott and his brother Lloyd A. Knott enlisted in the Army Quartermaster Corps. Lloyd Knott served until he was discharged in late 1945. Marion Knott only served seven months until he was discharged in 1943. At the time of his military service, Marion reported that he was 65 inches tall and weighed 133 pounds.

After his military service, Marion Knott moved from Fairbury to Seneca, Illinois. He then worked about 20 years as a carpenter for DuPont Chemical Company. In June of 1944, Marion married for a second time to a woman named Irene. They were married in Eureka, Illinois. After just one year of marriage, Marion filed for divorce from Irene. He claimed that she had slapped him in the face and struck him with a broom. In Marion's divorce request, he asked for custody of their daughter Bonnie Jean Knott. The divorce was eventually granted, but he did not get custody of his daughter.

May of 1948 proved to be the most exciting discovery ever made by the Fairbury Archaeological Society. Six miles north of Fairbury, where Indian Creek empties into the Vermilion River, a burned-out structure was being excavated for a new house. When some artifacts were found, digging was stopped. P. C. James, the land-owner, gave permission to the Fairbury Archaeological Society to carefully excavate the site.

Edgar Zook, Marion Knott, Guy Slater, Clinton Harris, Willis Harris, Jr., and Don Merrill of Fairbury participated in this archaeological dig. This group carefully used trowels, whisk brooms, and spatulas to excavate the site. They also took measurements and photographs of the project. They found a human skeleton, on its left side with the knees flexed and facing the southwest. Evidence indicated the person had suffered a violent death. A two-inch gash, which could have been made by a blunt-edged weapon, was on the right side of the skull. The lower jaw bone was also broken.

Other artifacts at the site indicated the burial dated back to the Woodland culture. This culture existed between 500 A.D. and 1,500 A.D. On the right arm of the skeleton was a crude, leaf-shaped arrow of quartzite and the middle part of a flat drill. Beneath the skeleton was a five-inch split-bone awl. The awl was very sharp and highly polished from much use. The skeleton and artifacts were donated to the Illinois State Museum.

In 1954, Marion Knott married Margaret C. Parker in Ottawa. Her first husband, Early McIntire had died in 1951. Marion was 49 when he married 51 year old Margaret Parker. In 1975, Margaret died at the age of 72.

In 1980, seventy-six year old Marion Knott went missing from his Seneca home. A couple days later a farmer found his body under a pile of hay after the farmer noticed

some of the hay had been moved. An autopsy found Marion had died from cardiac arrest caused by a brutal assault. Marion was found to have broken ribs, a fractured jaw, and a fractured femur. The police speculated it might have been a robbery case because Marion was known to carry large amounts of cash. Within a few weeks of the murder, local authorities administered a polygraph to their only suspect. The suspect passed the polygraph test and the police had no more suspects.

Marion's extensive collection of Native American artifacts were sold at a public auction at the Ramada Inn in Ottawa held a few months after his death. After 41 years, the murder of one of Fairbury's most avid collectors of Native American artifacts remains unsolved.